

\new\paradigm

On New Way of Thinking, 7 Jan 1988

The "new way of thinking" is usually described by Gorbachev in terms of seeking mutual security, rejecting the "old way" of seeking to improve security unilaterally, at the price of reducing the security of the other.

But does this mean, sustaining, refraining from threatening, the security of each other's empire, its sphere of domination? That is presumably what "detente" meant to Nixon and Kissinger, who felt betrayed when the Soviets, despite arms control agreements in 1972, 74 and 75, "interfered" with our imperial operations in Angola. What does it mean with respect to Soviet and US relations to the war in Afghanistan, and to Soviet threats against Poland; or Soviet and American relations to the "Sandinista regime" (i.e., the legitimate and legally elected government of Nicaragua, emplaced and empowered neither by the US nor the SU nor Cuba) or to the present ruling junta in El Salvador?

The world would be safer than it is, probably, if neither interfered with the other's imperial operations: neither with money, material support (e.g., oil), but especially not with arms, technicians, specialists or military advisors (let alone troops, which has not yet occurred). This would leave vast areas of injustice, misery and oppression in each other's spheres. Uprisings would still occur, leading to imperial repression: and probably, charges that the other is breaking its pledge or practice of restraint (though with less basis than before), and appeals by the insurgents for actual help.

It is strongly appealing to the domestic ideology of each to respond to appeals for help from dissidents or insurgents in the other's zone; and thus legitimizing and politically strengthening for each to do so (this applies to Cuba, too). But self-restraint against such inclinations by the superpowers could also be legitimised, in the interest of reducing the risks of superpower conflict (and the reciprocal tensions of the cold war).

A rather unedifying example of such prudent restraint was the failure of the US Government to pass on to Solidarity its knowledge, from a high-level defector, of the coming Polish military crackdown; as well as Western failure to respond strongly to that suppression. The Soviets have been equally unwilling to make pledges to Nicaragua, as they were to help Allende. But each side could, in theory, go even further to refrain from any aid or encouragement to "independence movements" in the other's sphere, or even to help the repressive processes.

But this pursuit of peace at the expense of any sense of

justice would confirm, or fail to challenge, imperial and militaristic values and personnel at the heart of each superpower's regime. It would, to some extent, deprive the other of its "enemy," as a legitimization of its own imperial operations; but that in itself would tend to destabilize such an arrangement, for the uprisings that would come about anyway would give rise to strong pressures to reconstitute the sense of an enemy as "the focus of evil" that explains the challenges and justifies a violent response and the general preparations for other such responses. This is basically what happened in early 1979, after the fall of the Shah and Somoza (and the earlier triumph of Marxist regimes in Indochina, Angola and Mozambique: though none of these, except Indochina, owed much to the Soviet Union).

Moreover, a largescale uprising in East Germany would still have the potential of drawing in the West Germans, leading to superpower and possibly nuclear conflict. And regional conflict in the Middle East could have the same effect.

A better approach would have each side refrain from arms sales in the Third World, especially in the volatile Middle East (and in Latin America). And to cooperate in constructive efforts to end, reduce and avert regional conflicts.

Still better would be for each refrain from military aid of any kind in "its own" sphere, and above all, from military presence or troops. This would include refraining from encouragement, aid, or support to any ally or client state in its inclinations to settle disputes by resort to armed force, against the UN Charter (as, Iraq-Iran; Israel-Lebanon; Vietnam-Cambodia (though Pol Pot's genocidal regime, and its border incursions, both encouraged by China, posed a special challenge; earlier, North Korea-South Korea; Taiwan-China). "Bring the troops home from the Third World."

If both sides pursued such policies comprehensively, it would be very hard to demonstrate that the national security of either would be endangered at all, nor that a tide of Communism was likely to result in any region.

But what of East and West Europe? Why not bring the superpower troops home from there as well? Bring them all home (and demobilize most of them)! Is that conceivable? Is it desirable? In what context might it come about, and what would the consequences be? What are the actual obstacles to this, the arguments, realistic and not, to made against it?

John Gaddis, in How the Cold War Might End (Atlantic, November, 1987) seems to conclude resignedly (and, I would say, complacently), after reviewing risks and obstacles to change that the best way to "end" the Cold War is simply to rename it, reconceive it: "...to begin to think of the Soviet-American

relationship not as as a 'cold war' but rather as a 'long peace'--as the most workable, if still imperfect, set of arrangements for maintaining international order that the world has devised in this century..." (p. 100)

I say Gaddis "seems" to conclude this. This is not totally clear, because the sentence above begins, "What would happen if we were" and ends with a question-mark. Moreover, he goes on to ask: "Might we gain new perspectives that could make the relationship a safer one, without compromising our vital interests and without losing touch with our principles? Might this be a way to combine the conservative's concern not to sacrifice what has worked in the past with the liberal's insistence upon progress toward a more equitable future?"

These questions suggest the possibility of going well beyond the status quo; yet he provides no specifics (his answer to the questions is simply: "It is difficult to say." This ends the next to last paragraph of the essay). And his earlier description of vital interests on both sides and of "what has worked in the past"--which seems, by omission of any critique, to include the nuclear arms race in all its details as well as the NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation--seems to imply the "conservative" preservation of every aspect of the status quo that seems both fundamental and ominous.

It is hard to be certain that this is his message, because he couches what seem to be his prescriptions to this effect always in ambiguous and tentative terms: e.g., "Arguments like these tempt one to invoke what history will record as the Bert Lance Principle: 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' There is, in fact, something to be said for that point of view." (p. 100) He proceeds to say what that is (and, on this final page, as earlier, he fails to argue for any other point of view, or to suggest any other answer to his question, "how one might end the Cold War itself"):

"Results are difficult to argue with, and it can hardly be denied that the four decades that we think of as the Cold War, years that have seen as high and as protracted a level of international tension without war as any in modern history, have also been four decades of Great Power peace, a period that compares favorably with the longest such periods of coexistence without war in modern history....There has been nothing utopian about the order the superpowers have imposed since 1945: it has been firmly grounded in the world as it is. Perhaps that is why it has lasted as long as it has."

Gaddis does raise two questions about this observation: "But is it not Orwellian to call such a situation 'peace,' knowing that a nuclear holocaust could break out at any moment?...We also think of peace as consistent with justice." But in answer to the

last point, he suggests that we would do better to think of justice as coming after peace: "to think of peace, in the way Reinhold Niebuhr suggested, as the condition of order that precedes justice, as the compromise with power that has to take place before one can begin to address--as one ultimately still has to--questions of right and wrong." (Again, I read this as his proposal, in context, though as usual his statement is in tentative mode: "The more feasible approach might be...").

As for the first question, he points out (and leaves the matter there): "What has sustained the peace since 1945, many would argue [he does not state any disagreement], is precisely the prospect of what might ensue if it should ever come apart." How much assurance does this give us for the future? Enough, Gaddis seems to feel; enough to underwrite a conclusion that the nuclear arms race and "deterrence" has "worked," will continue to work equally well, that it "ain't broke" and should not be tampered with.

His assurance about this seems to be related to an earlier comment (p. 90). After noting that one way the Cold War might be ended is by a nuclear war, he makes the rather astonishing statement: "but there is not a great deal one can say about that, because we have so little basis for anticipating what the results of such a conflict might be."

He goes on: "What one can say, though, is that the widespread sense of inevitability about a nuclear holocaust that existed during the 1950s and 1960s appears, at least among "experts" on the subject, to be waning. Although public concern about the possibility of a nuclear war remains high, specialists point to the obvious irrationality of starting such a conflict on purpose, to the remarkably low frequency of 'accidental' wars in history, to the increasingly effective safeguards against unauthorized use of nuclear weapons which exist on both sides, and to the marked decline in the incidence of both overt and implied nuclear threats which has occurred in recent years... There can be, of course, no guarantees. Irrationality in high places will always be a risk, and because Murphy's Law operates in capitalist and socialist societies alike--as the Challenger and Chernobyl disasters have recently reminded us--accidents can hardly be ruled out. Still, the record of four decades having passed without any nuclear weapons having been used for any military purpose whatever is an impressive one."

Gaddis reiterates the last point in a later passage (p. 96). "Despite attempts to impress each other by suggesting the opposite, the United States and the Soviet Union have in fact reserved the employment of nuclear weapons for the ultimate extremity of all-out war. They have accepted painful military reverses in limited conflicts--Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan--rather than resort to such use." (Readers of my papers will be

familiar with the point that "employment" and "use" can take the form of threats, backed up by deployments, plans, and command and control arrangements that preclude these threats realistically being regarded as total bluffs. In other words, Gaddis' assertions here are wrong, or misleading, and his ignorance, common among mainstream analysts, of the historical record of "near misses" is an inadequate basis for assurance about the future.)

The fact is that the "experts" and "specialists" Gaddis correctly paraphrases do not merely infer from the considerations he cites that nuclear war is "not inevitable". As pollsters have noted, they regard it (in great contrast to the public) as having extremely low probability, and as becoming less rather than more likely. And it is clear, from his subsequent neglect of this issue and above all from his apparent conclusion, that Gaddis agrees with them.

But these experts are full of shit.

Those who believe instead, as I do, that the current world situation presents--alongside "traditional" evils of horrible injustice, oppression, conventional wars and avoidable human suffering--a significantly large and growing risk of large-scale nuclear war, will be strongly motivated to explore ways of changing and not merely renaming the relations of the nuclear powers to each other and to the rest of humanity.

Some propositions relevant to a new way of thinking: and a new way for Americans and Soviets to discuss with each other:

It may be--I suggest it is the case--that:

There will not be, perhaps there cannot be, major and persistent changes in US foreign and military posture and policy without major changes in that of the Soviet Union. And vice versa.

Persistent major change in either requires a process involving major change in both.

Specifically, major permanent reduction in the strategic nuclear threat either poses to the other, requires change in both in their relations to certain of their allies or dependencies within "their own" spheres of influence or domination. (This will probably require changes in the balance of domestic power in their own national political economies).

Thus, the orientation and readiness of Soviet military formations in East Europe and the western Soviet Union for offensive action into West Europe--evidently planned to deter or counter West German intervention in East European uprisings, especially in East Germany--must be abandoned.

More generally, Soviet domination of East Europe by military presence or threat must cease; along with a NATO posture (especially in West Germany) that poses a threat of military intervention or intimidation in East Europe. This presumes significant military reductions in both Germanies, probably leading to their closer integration, by federation or otherwise. This in turn implies a greatly changed relation for each half of Germany to its present superpower ally and its other allies.

Fear of the uncertainties and risks associated with a transformed Germany, not only in each superpower but in most other European nations East and West, has been a major factor in causing most of these nations (including, to a large extent, the two Germanys themselves) to promote or at least tolerate the Cold War, along with the nuclear arms race. Yet "the German problem" has been largely suppressed from discussion on both sides (and in Germany) since at least the mid-Fifties. Can it really be that there is no better way of addressing these various concerns than by prolonging this confrontation of nuclear-armed hordes across the middle of Germany? We are not likely to discover one without addressing the issues directly, bringing them out of the closet.

This is just one, major example of an issue where frank talk--risking the wounding of sensitivities within and across

alliances--may be a necessary precursor to new solutions. There seems a new potential for such discussion between Soviets and Westerners. On both sides--in contrast to Gaddis and his experts--there is a widely-shared sense of urgency about the need to reduce the risks of nuclear war and the burdens of the arms race, hence a willingness to address whatever bears on these. And on the Soviet side, there is an unprecedented willingness, under Gorbachev's glasnost, to entertain and discuss criticism of past and current Soviet practices.

Why is the latter point so helpful? Because both sides must change, in ways that will depend on insight and creativity on both sides. American critics of the present situation should not, I am suggesting, restrict themselves to analysis and criticism of American policy. Many Americans opposed to the Cold War and the arms race have done so, on various grounds: they know more about it, they are more responsible for the behavior of their own government, they have a much better chance to influence it, they do not wish to contribute to the government's Cold War ideology and demonization of the Soviet Union, and they may feel substantively that it is the US that has been and remains the driving force in the relationship, especially in the nuclear arms race.

I suggest that such reasons, all together, are not adequate to justify a continued failure to analyse privately or discuss publicly the Soviet contribution to the international system that threatens us all, and desirable changes in the Soviet role. For one thing--not the only consideration, but an important one--silence on these matters is extremely costly to credibility and influence on an American audience. If governmental propaganda and Cold War indoctrination is to be countered effectively (which is, ironically, the precise aim of many of those who impose on themselves a "vow of silence" on criticisms of the Soviet Union or revolutionary socialist states) it will not be done by spokespersons who present themselves as unable or unwilling to criticise the shortcomings or realistic role of other countries--especially the Soviet Union--as strongly as they criticise their own country.

It is just as important the Soviet analysts hear these criticisms or observations: and precisely, from Americans who express themselves with the same freedom about defects of American policy, and entertain seriously Soviet comments on these. It is only now, under Gorbachev, that Soviets are willing to enter actively into critical discussions of Soviet policy. American critics of American policy should be newly willing to do the same, with Soviets as at home.

Although each side can and must take unilateral initiatives and make unilateral proposals, and each can suggest opportunities

for such steps to the other, the objective that I think deserves new emphasis in the peace movements on both sides is to invent and promote possibilities of major, broad (going beyond nuclear and military policies alone) mutual change. This is not limited to negotiated agreements or comprehensive treaties, which may not even deserve primary attention. But it does mean comprehensive thinking, and broadly coordinated movement. What is needed (and for the first time seems possibly achievable on the Soviet side) are enough changes in major elements of posture on both sides to reduce sharply, more or less simultaneously, the perception on each side of "threat" posed by the other.

Let me include in the word "posture" for each: a) its internal political/economic system (roughly, advanced liberal capitalism for the US, state "socialism" for the SU); (b) its military capabilities for attack and expansion, both outside its "sphere of influence" and within it; (c) its practices of attack, threat and domination, within its own sphere.

Each superpower has an ideology which theorizes that the internal political economy of the other demands or strongly impels the other to seek unlimited economic and political expansion and domination of others, effectively seeking to enlarge its sphere of hegemony to global domination (encompassing the elimination of the rival political-economic system).

For each of these theories there exists some plausible evidence and arguments, along with strong counter-evidence; the limits on realism for each will be addressed later. But what I wish to observe here is that for each side, the elements (b) and (c) in the other's posture appear to each to be compatible with, even strongly confirming of the validity of its theory of the aggressive and expansionist character of its underlying political economy (a).

Thus the other's posture as a whole, including elements (a)-(c), comprise and confirm a "threat," to which its own capabilities (b) and practices (c) appear to it --with some sincerity and even realism, along with elements of unrealism--to form an appropriate, necessary, justified countering response.

A basic thesis underlying my discussion is that the posture of each superpower provides, in the perceptions and inferences of the other (partly distorted, but partly realistic), strong, even compelling justification for the other's posture. Thus the two postures form a bilateral system which, for all its perceived dangers, has proved and remains very stable against any efforts within either side for unilateral change, and even against proposals for limited bilateral change.

For example: Khrushchev's efforts to reduce conventional

forces and hold down strategic nuclear forces to a minimum in the early '60's was a casualty of the Kennedy build-up and US "victories" in confrontations in the Taiwan Straits, Berlin and Cuba. Publicity on the subsequent Soviet buildup--both strategic and "against Europe"--and especially on its continuation after 1975, has forestalled any effective pressure for unilateral restraint (except, with limited success, on the MX) in the US or NATO. Even proposals for bilateral change, advanced by the Soviets or by American critics of the arms race, such as proposals for a bilateral Comprehensive Test Ban, no-first-use policies, continued ban on development of space-based defenses, or reductions in strategic offensive forces--all in the sphere of strategic arms, without proposing changes in the Soviet "non-nuclear threat to Western Europe"--have gotten nowhere in the US.

If any major part of this bilateral system is to be changed radically and permanently, I conjecture that it must be examined, understood and addressed as a bilateral system, by participants on both sides. Why both? Because at this point, I suspect, each needs to listen to and learn from the other, about itself as much as about the other.

I suggest that on each issue and concrete instance on each side, there is a need to solicit and pay close attention to the interpretations of both sides. This is not primarily for reasons of tact. I am increasingly impressed by the following pattern in international discussion of many separate issues: that each side brings to bear an awareness of certain realities that are neglected (in that context) or denied or mythologized by the other side. (In one particular form of this, when the two parties each defend certain of their own practices and attack certain of the other's, an "objective" listener might well judge that the defenses in each case were inadequate while the criticisms were accurate and were being ignored by their targets.) These realities, wrongly ignored by one side or the other, could be said to include "moral realities," clearcut violations of widely-accepted human rights or moral principles.

Here the model of "two parties" is inadequate (even apart from the alliance structure) because within each superpower (as is now apparent in the Soviet Union) there is a body of dissenters from current and past policies. These critics are vulnerable to being perceived by unquestioning "patriots" within each nation, quite inaccurately, as unquestioning tools of the other power. But, as I discussed earlier, it does tend to be true that neither of these groups, any more than the respective mainstream groups that follow their government's line, maintains a comprehensive grasp of relevant "realities."

Critics might be especially shocked to hear some of the views of the dissenters in the other camp; but it is worth their exposing themselves to that shock, as a part of the whole process

of sorting out, eventually, major myths and illusions, and denied or neglected realities on each side: including those associated with the critical "peace" movements on each side (and with one's own thinking, including mine, and yours).